

Rep. Dawn Morrell

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2007 SESSION REPORT

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Please join
Rep. Dawn Morrell
for a

Town Hall Meeting

Saturday, March 17
10-11:30 am
Puyallup City Council Chambers
107 N. Meridian in Puyallup

Representative Dawn Morrell

25th Legislative District

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Joint Committee on Veterans' & Military Affairs, *Co-chair*
Health Care, *Vice Chair*
Appropriation
Select Committee on Environmental Health
Joint Legislative-Executive Task Force on Long Term Care Financing and Chronic Care Management, *Chair*

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Dear Neighbors,

The 2007 legislative session is off to a great start. Our budget is in good shape, there is a spirit of cooperation and optimism, and leaders are focused on improving education, health care and other services that are top priorities for our area.

I am proud, and grateful, to be a voice for our communities. But I always believe it is possible to do a better job; so I hope you'll take a moment to look through this newsletter and get back to me with your thoughts and suggestions.

Many of the laws I've championed for our communities—including property tax relief, help for military families, and ideas for improving education, health care and public safety—came from ideas sent to me by local citizens. So please don't hesitate to send me your ideas about what state government should be (or should not be) doing.

I hope you'll also remember that my Legislative Assistant, Annie Johnson, and I take great pride in constituent service. So if you need information, or assistance in dealing with a state agency, let us know. We'll do our best to help.

Please keep my contact information handy. I'd enjoy hearing from you!

Warmly,

Dawn
Dawn Morrell

2007 SESSION REPORT

Education is
priority #1

Helping more kids succeed in school and go on to college is by far the top priority for 2007. Leaders are uniting behind exciting plans to improve early learning, reduce class sizes, and provide more personalized assistance to students who need extra help to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). We're also exploring ways to improve math scores—including hiring hundreds of new math teachers to allow for more "hands on" instruction.

In higher education, I'm very optimistic we'll get needed state funding to build the new Communication Arts/Allied Health Building at Pierce College Puyallup. I've worked on this for years because the state-of-the-art facility will enable local students to land tomorrow's good-paying jobs in technology and health care.

We also need to put college within the reach of more families by expanding enrollments, boosting scholarships and financial aid and holding down costs—including a possible tuition freeze at Pierce College Puyallup and other community colleges. All in all, I expect this to be a great year for education in the Legislature. Our kids and grandkids deserve nothing less.

Health care for all children

All our hopes for our children and grandchildren depend on their health. The same is true for all children in Washington: they need to be healthy to succeed in school and in life. I see this everyday as a nurse and as your state representative.

We've made good progress toward our goal of "Covering All Kids" by 2010, but there is more to do. This year, I'm helping to lead an effort to expand health coverage to 32,000 additional kids. We also intend to get better value for our spending by combining three programs into one and setting clear goals for immunizations and well-child checkups.

Kids who are covered are more likely to avoid preventable illnesses, more likely to succeed in school, and more likely to see doctors before emergency room treatment is needed. As a nurse, I would never deny health care to a child. It's the right thing to do.



The planned
Communication
Arts/Allied Health
Building at Pierce
College Puyallup
would be a huge
boon to local
students looking
for good jobs in
health care and
high-tech fields.

Meth addicts and metal theft

A big ‘thank you’ to the Puyallup Police Department for testifying so strongly for my bill (HB 1251) to crack down on metal theft. They testified that meth addicts and other criminals are increasingly stealing copper and other metals because they can get cash quickly from resellers who often pay good money and ask few questions.

Metal theft is costing taxpayers, businesses and farmers a fortune. It is also dangerous, especially when downed power lines are cut up. Some 15,000 Comcast customers recently lost service when a cable was cut in an apparent attempt at metal theft. The bill I’ve proposed, and that law enforcement supports, would require metal resellers to take more steps—and keep better records—to ensure they are not paying cash to criminals for stolen property.



Puyallup Police Chief Robin James joined me to strongly support my bill to crack down on metal theft and meth addicts. Officer Pete Bellmer also gave powerful testimony.

Helping seniors with drug costs

I gladly co-sponsored the first bill signed into law this year. HB 1095 takes care of the Medicare Part-D co-pay for the lowest-income seniors and persons with disabilities. This will help about 100,000 very low income Washingtonians.



Respecting rights in mobile home communities

We have a lot of mobile home communities in our area. Most have terrific landlords and tenants. But an unreasonable landlord or tenant can make life miserable. I’ve heard from many senior citizens and others who felt powerless when a landlord violated lease agreements or treated them unfairly. They can’t afford lawyers or court costs if their rights are violated. So what can they do?



I’ve proposed a solution: a Mobile Home Dispute Resolution Program (HB 1461) to help tenants and landlords resolve disputes without having to go to court. Here’s how it would work: The state Attorney General (AG) would hear complaints from tenants and/or landlords, and try to work out an agreement. If a friendly agreement is not possible, the AG would order corrective action, and issue a fine if the citation is not obeyed within a reasonable time.

Resolving complaints without having to go to court will save time and money for everyone. The Mobile Home Owners of America and Manufactured Home Owners Association strongly support my proposal, so I hope we can make it law this year.

Working for Veterans and Military Families

One of my most important jobs in the Legislature is to serve as co-chair of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs. I come from a military family, and I believe we have a duty to honor service to our country with deeds as well as words. So far, we’re making good progress this year on military and veterans’ issues.

Increase allowable military leave time from 15 days to 30 days.

A constituent who is a police officer and a Guardsman asked me to sponsor this bill out of fairness to military families. I asked the House to remember that we are expecting more from our National Guard and others in the service, and leave policies should be fair. The House passed my bill unanimously. Our citizen soldiers shouldn’t have to use their own vacation time to train to protect us.

Waive late weapons permit fees for armed forces personnel. I sponsored this bill because people in the armed forces should not have to pay a \$10 late fee for concealed pistol license renewals if they were serving outside the state when their licenses expired. It passed the House unanimously.

A new veterans’ cemetery. A top priority for veterans is the creation of a military cemetery for honorably discharged veterans in Eastern Washington, which is home to 140,000 veterans. It isn’t right that families in Eastern Washington have to travel hundreds of miles to honor the fallen. Veterans, and their loved ones, deserve this new cemetery.

The Washington Rest in Peace Act was the second new law of 2007. I co-sponsored this law to end the sickening practice of disrespecting the deceased and their families at military funerals. Our fallen heroes deserve respect, and families have a right to mourn in peace. Although the repulsive protests, which have occurred in many states, have so far only targeted military funerals, the new law protects everyone by banning protests within 500 feet of any funeral or funeral procession.



Making health insurance affordable

How can we make health insurance more affordable while preserving the choice of health plans and doctors? One way is to invite individuals and employees of small businesses to join a “connector”—a public-private partnership that pools purchasing power in order to bargain for much lower prices from insurance companies. People would choose the health plan that best fits their needs from a menu of affordable plans offered by the pool.

Pooling purchasing power could reduce the cost of a health insurance policy by as much as 40 percent. Better yet, the policy would stay with you even if you lose your job or change employers. This reform would be a huge change and still requires much discussion and fine-tuning. But as a critical care nurse and as Vice Chair of the Health Care & Wellness Committee, I often hear tragedies because people couldn’t afford or have lost their health insurance. We need to listen to the people and find bold solutions now!

Property taxes

People in fast-growing areas like ours are getting hammered by property-tax assessments they can’t control or afford. I have fought for property-tax relief every year that I’ve represented you in the Legislature. I value our earlier successes, but I’m now convinced that curbing property-tax rates isn’t enough. Soaring property-tax assessments are the biggest problem for families and retirees.

That’s why I proposed a constitutional amendment (HJR 4205) to prohibit state property-tax assessments from increasing by more than one percent annually. This limit would apply to the state’s share of property-taxes and would remain in force until the property is sold or used to secure certain kinds of loans. A constitutional lid on assessments is the best answer to wild property-tax spikes. Property owners need tax relief that is real, noticeable and permanent. My proposal would provide it.

